

**Opening Statement of Honorable Michael C. Burgess, M.D.**  
**Subcommittee on Health**  
**Hearing on “Examining Initiatives to Advance Public Health”**  
**May 17, 2017**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

This Subcommittee has the responsibility of advancing legislation to improve and strengthen public health policy for all Americans. Today, we will examine four bipartisan bills intended to improve public health for some of our most vulnerable, at-risk populations.

In 2015, a 5-year study of nearly 30,000 fire fighters found that fire fighters had a greater number of cancer diagnoses and cancer-related deaths than the general population. While this built upon prior studies that have examined the link between firefighting and cancer, our understanding of this connection is still limited.

To improve upon our ability to alleviate the health risks these public servants face, Representatives Collins and Pascrell introduced H.R. 931, the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act of 2017. This bill would authorize funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to create a national registry for the collection of data pertaining to cancer incidence among firefighters. I look forward to hearing more from our witness about how H.R. 931, will fill the void in our understanding of the health risks our nations’ firefighters face.

Another bill we will consider seeks to ensure that victims in federally declared disasters have access to medical care by establishing a uniform Good Samaritan standard for volunteer health care professionals. Federal and state laws have developed to encourage health care professionals to volunteer by providing limited liability protection—recent events have exposed gaps in in those laws that led to delays in the ability of volunteers to provide care.

To prevent this from happening in the future, Representatives Blackburn and Ruppertsberger introduced H.R. 1876, the Good Samaritan Health Professionals Act of 2017. This bill would provide limited civil liability protection to licensed healthcare providers during a declared disaster. I look forward to hearing from our witness about importance of H.R. 1876 to disaster victims.

We will also discuss legislation to strengthen the ability of our healthcare workforce to recognize and care for victims of human trafficking. Identifying victims of trafficking is a crucial first step in getting them the support they need, but it is an incredibly challenging task. A reported 68 percent of trafficking victims end up in a health care setting at some point, and this can serve as an important chance for providers to step in and help. Having spent nearly three decades practicing medicine, I know that feeling prepared to handle such a difficult situation requires adequate training and protocols. However, the vast majority of providers do not have access to such resources.

To address this gap, Representatives Cohen and Kinzinger introduced H.R. 767, the SOAR to Health and Wellness Act of 2017. This bill would build on a pilot program underway at the Department of Health and Human Services that has enhanced the capacity of communities to identify victims and survivors. I look forward to hearing from our witness about how this bill will address an unmet need for trafficking victims and health care providers throughout the US.

Finally, we will learn about the Action for Dental Health Act of 2017, authored by Representative Kelly. This bill would take several steps to support and improve dental health for some of our most vulnerable populations, including children and the elderly. I look forward to learning more from our witness about the importance of the initiatives in this bill to the dental health of all Americans, but especially those known to be underserved.

I thank all of our witnesses for being here, and I look forward to hearing from each of you.